

## **Irish mental health in Birmingham: What is appropriate and culturally competent mental health care?**

In June 2008 a significant report about the mental health of the Irish people in Birmingham was launched by the Centre for Community Mental Health.

This report was developed by a unique partnership between the Centre, Birmingham Irish Welfare and Information Centre; Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust; a GP practice at Balsall Heath Health Centre; Immigrant Counselling and Psychotherapy; and the Federation of Irish Societies.

The launch was opened by the Lord Mayor, Chauhdry Abdul Rashid JP. Speakers from mental health service commissioning and other organisations talked about the implications of the report and 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Irish people who had taken part in the research talked about their experiences.

The launch was attended by representatives from a wide range of organisations including, Sally Westney, Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University and Dr Surinder Sharma, the Department of Health's Director for Equality and Human Rights. Liam Byrne MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office sent a message of support.

The report presents three key messages.

Many Ireland-born people face multiple mental and physical health problems. They need professionals who understand Irish culture. Past experiences of racism and discrimination means that many are reluctant to seek help. Even today, Irish stereotyping continues to have a negative effect.

Professionals know little about Irish people's particular needs and this can affect the assessment and care of those with mental health problems; a situation that is compounded by the lack of liaison between the NHS and Irish welfare organisations.

The children of Ireland-born people face the same pressures as their counterparts in other minority ethnic groups; a factor that has not previously been reported in any other study. Growing up in England means that they are uncertain of their identity and often feel rejected by Irish society. Many reported that, from childhood, they had to help their parents deal with certain aspects of life in England, such as writing letters. Like their parents, they reported experiences of stereotyping and wanted professionals who understood their cultural background.

Finally, the report presents a number of recommendations about the need for improvements in inter-agency working, staff development, patient assessment and care.

These, it is hoped, will bring about improvements in the treatment of Irish people with mental health problems and promote the development of culturally-competent mental health care.

The report can be downloaded from the Centre for Community Mental Health website at [http://www.health.bcu.ac.uk/ccmh/ccmh\\_publications.htm](http://www.health.bcu.ac.uk/ccmh/ccmh_publications.htm)